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ABSTRACT

Using interviews and subcultural artifacts, such as inner sleeves of albums, this paper reports on the career of Holly Near and the history of Redwood Records, a label providing music to the lesbian-feminist subculture. First, the paper discusses the political and artistic avenues that were available to Near, the reasons she chose political music, and her gradual progression from a folk madonna style of music and appearance to a lesbian-feminist influenced style. The paper then discusses the transformation of Redwood Records from a failing business to a more profitable organization. Finally, the report emphasizes how Near and Redwood Records worked to build connections between movements, for example the feminist movement and the anti-nuclear movement, as if it were part of feminist ideology to build bridges between political and cultural movements. (SRT)

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The History of Redwood Records:

Cultural and Economic Perspectives on a Feminist Subculture

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Presented at the International Communication Association
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The following paper is but one section of an extensive study of a subcultural recording company in the United States. The basis of this study is founded in two critical philosophies: cultural studies and political economy. Many might find this position between two somewhat opposed perspectives, precarious to say the least, yet I found both perspectives provided a more complete picture of the subcultural organization, its members and the subculture(s) in which the organization existed. The cultural studies perspective clarified the experience of the individuals, the patterns of change within the organization, the relationships among the individuals, and the practices of creation and communication by the organization and the effect on its subculture. The political economy perspective honed in on the organizational constraint and the various pressures placed upon any business within a capitalist system.

The methods used to gather the data were qualitative in nature: personal documents, participant observation, secondary data (state and federal documents, newspaper accounts, etc.) and most importantly to this presentation, the analysis of the artifacts produced by the subcultural organization.

The subcultural organization under study is a recording label known as Redwood Records, located in Oakland, California. For the past ten years, Redwood Records and its primary artist and co-owner, Holly Near, have provided music to the lesbian-feminist subculture and have supported the women's music industry. Women's music is defined as music (and other supporting components of the industry) which are primarily

produced by women, for women, about women's life experiences while economically controlled by women. The women's music industry in the United States presently consists of over 100 local production companies (which produce local concerts of women's music), 15 women's music record distributors, 100 performers playing in 80 coffeehouses, clubs, and bars. Over 38 recording labels (including Redwood Records) produce albums which are sold in 100 feminist bookstores as well as other alternative record stores. There are also 20 women's music festivals produced throughout the United States every year which provides a forum for new artists. The primary audience for women's music is lesbians and lesbian/feminists and feminists. This new industry grew from a need for lesbian artists to produce their music and a need by lesbians to hear music which reinforced their lifestyle. Thus a complete music industry grew which produced concerts, recorded albums, distributed albums, and retails albums to a specific audience.

Although there is a great historical record concerning women's music and the industry, this presentation will focus on one recording label, Redwood Records. The basis of Redwood Records history was derived from Holly Near albums (lyrics, inner sleeves, and record jackets) and a reading of these subcultural artifacts; Redwood Records press releases and informational packets; a variety of record and concert reviews; magazine and journal interviews with Holly Near and; other musicians within women's music and the other two owners of Redwood Records, JoLynne Worley and Joanie Shoemaker. This historical foundation

illumines the pressures and constraints placed upon, and within Redwood Records as a subcultural organization, persisting against a dominant ideology and a dominant recording industry. Changes in Redwood's politics, business practices and Near's musical style attest to this persistence.

In the case of Redwood Records, the organization is involved in social and political change. The artifacts become documents of Redwood's position as well as documents of production. The artifact, therefore, may be more true to the subculture than a dominant cultural product to its culture. The interest here is in the recordings, jackets, inserts, and participants on the albums.

The struggle of Redwood Records is, in many ways, the struggle of Holly Near. It is appropriate to discuss the avenues which were available to Near and the reasons she chose political music.

Near was raised in a creative, politically aware environment. Life in the country and the absence of television in the home helped form children who could entertain themselves and others. The music heard in the Near household included strong women singers (Odetta and Ronnie Gilbert of the Weavers) as well as other political performers. Ann Near, Holly's mother, also provided a strong role model for her children. As often noted (Evans) many leaders in the feminist movement came from Old Left families where the questioning of traditions and political institutions was the norm. Therefore, it is not surprising that Near would later reject traditional roles of women in society and become one of the lesbian-feminist leaders of women's music.[21]

In high school, Near's politics became apparent when she transformed a Kingston Trio-like singing groups she joined into a Weavers-like group. After high school graduation and a season of summer stock, Near attended University of California at Los Angeles for a year of theater, music, and political science. She started getting jobs in film and theater, but her free hours were spent stuffing envelopes for Another Mother For Peace. At this point, Near's life was divided between art and politics. By day, she performed, rarely discussing her political position, while at night, she donated her time to the political arena, relegating her career to the back burner.

In the same way that other feminist leaders gained experience by their work in non-feminist movements, Near gained political savvy by her work in the anti-war movment. In 1970, students were killed at Kent State and Jackson State while Near was performing in Broadway show, Hair. Soon after, Near auditioned for Free the Army (FTA) show and toured with Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland, Len Chandler and other artists. FTA performed for servicemen and women who were opposed to the war. Near expanded her understanding of imperialism and the use of racisim and sexism in war. This understanding came out in songs she wrote. Following FTA, Near joined Fonda and Tom Hayden in the Indochina Peace Campaign, performing her songs across the U.S. Near received requests for these songs. Day camps wanted to use them and artists wanted to use them as audio backdrops to their images against the war. For each request, Near would make a casssette, singing the songs a capella.

In between tours and peace work, Near actively sought a major labels record deal but she asked for artistic freedom and control. She found interest in her talent, curiousity in her substantial following (for an unknown) and hesitation in her lyrics. Although Near had the folk madonna style (long flowing hair, blue jeans and soprano voice), she was not willing to give up her powerful message and strong style for mainstream acceptance. One executive told her it was doubtful she would become a hit singer because she didn't have any element of submission in her voice. With the majors uninterested and a need for her music still unfilled, Near and a high school friend, Jeffrey Langley, recorded her first album, Hang In There (1973) on the Redwood label, one Near created soley for the release of this anti-war album. Although this first album definitely showed the impact the anti-war movement had on Near, threaded throughout the music was the strong woman ideal she had been taught as a child. Two songs particularly reinforce this point. "It's More Important To Me" describes how competition for a man can drive women apart:

> It's more important to me that we stay friends
> It's more important to me that we make amends
> So if he's the man you're after
> That I can understand
> It's more important to me that we don't fight
> because of a man.

A second ballad on this album, "Strong," discussed the social conditioning of a woman. Yet Near stated that she did not consider herself a feminist (Dunning, 1983). Both of these songs, though, clearly dealt with feminist issues and her style paralleled feminist philosophy, with an emphasis on the personal.

Near didn't talk abstractly about the evils of war but sang of its effects on us, our families, our friends, and our culture. She put faces on the enemy and personalized their experience. This made the war and the enemy harder to ignore.

All but two of the songs on this first album were written by Near and, with her voice and musical talent, many critics stated she could have produced a nice album of popular songs, like other folk madonnas of the time. She would not.

Near and Langley toured, sold albums after each concert, and made contacts with bookstores, but the real business end was handled by Ann and Russell Near (Holly's parents) out of their home in Ukiah, California. They shipped, packed, and did the bookkeeping for Holly's supporting recording label, Redwood Records.

Prior to this album, Near worked as a film and television actress, appearing in films such as The Slaughterhouse Five, and The Magic Garden of Stanley Sweetheart as well as such television shows as Mod Squad, Room 222, and The Partridge Family. This work financed her recording venture. But Near's life goals were changing. FTA and the success of her first album had affected her. Hang In There had sold out in three months (2000 copies). Near realized the political content of this album would not interest a major recording company but she believed a major recording company would be interested in her as a performer. In 1974, still meeting with major labels, Near and Langley grew impatient and recorded a second album: Holly Near: A Live Album, which was dedicated to "Ronnie Gilbert of the Weavers, a woman who knew how to sing and what to sing about." Similar to

Hang In There, A Live Album took an anti-war stand with a great deal of feminist sentiment. Near explained:

> By the time we did A Live Album both Jeff and I were learning a lot about the women's movement. I wasn't calling myself a feminist. But I'd started working on myself, and I was lucky to have someone with enough confidence in me to be able to support me as a friend as much as an accompanist (Dunning, 1983, H29).

This album included what became an anti-war movement anthem of the 1970s, "It Could Have Been Me." One producer friend of Near's joked with her that every time she wrote a piece of music that was commercial sounding, she would protect herself from success by writing political words (Kort, 1980, 16).

One feminist song from this album, "Get Off Me Baby," later caught the attention of Helen Reddy who recorded it and received mainstream air play. Whether Near was conscious of it or not, she was writing and singing songs that reflected a feminist philosophy. Even with her anti-war focus, the women's roles she sang of were far from traditional.

Some may argue that Near was not the only woman singing songs about women's oppression. Yet she was one of the few in the anti-war, folk tradition who sang of the end to that oppression. Others sang of the hardships women suffered but offered no end to it. This new approach caught the attention of the women's music audience who listened and accepted this "straight" woman's songs.

By 1975, "women's music" was rising in the lesbian-feminist subculture. Near was asked to work on a benefit concert for the San Francisco Women's Building with Cris Williamson, Meg

Christian (Olivia), Margie Adam (Pleiades Records), Lily Tomlin, and the Alice Stone Ladies Society Orchestra. The tour was an enormous success. Near elaborated:

> Thousands of people were thrilled with the quality of the music as well as the emotional power of the event. Later, as the music moved out into the world I was surprised by the controversy that erupted as a result of this culture. The songs were often too radical for the radicals, not because they were anti-male, but simply because they weren't about men (Journeys insert, 1983).

The controversy this music stirred up surprised Near and she reevaluated feminism. What was so threatening and unacceptable about these songs? While she questioned the Left's stance on women, her own politics were being questioned by some lesbian-feminists. In Los Angeles, for example, one women's music producer actually held a vote on whether to include Near in a program because she worked with Langley. Separatism, at that time, was crucial to lesbian-feminist ideology. Near found herself caught between two political movements, each with its own criterion for full acceptance. This did not anger Near but rather was of great interest to her. She believed she could learn from these women and welcomed the opportunity to hear their ideas and the struggles from which these ideas came.

You Can Know All I Am, Near's next album, was released in 1976 and was more openly feminist. The album crossed many musical styles and political movements. Near also sought mainstream air play for one song, "Winner Takes All," but was unsuccessful.

Although You Can Know All I Am still included anti-war, anti-imperialist songs, they were less frequent and the tone of the album was more woman-centered. This may have been due[21] to

Near's exposure to women's music and the musicians or to an awareness of the problems women faced in society. When this new album was released, some of her old fans raised questions about her left politics while her new fans questioned her feminist politics.

From 1975-1978, significant changes occured in Redwood Records and in Holly Near. When Near opened her heart to women's music in 1975, she also opened her heart to a woman. Near discussed this "coming out" process by stating that at first she thought, "can I really deal with what society hands out to a lesbian? Then I decided that wasn't a fair choice--to deny myself a happy and healthy part of life because of social criticism" (Faber, 1981, 103).

By 1977, Holly Near and Jeff Langley amicably ended their eleven year partnership and Near began to work soley with women musicians. Langley began work on his classical study which he had put off while working with Near. As Near's career had grown, so had Redwood Records and Ann and Russell Near decided they wanted to work in more supportive roles rather than be the main company representatives. In the true spirit of feminism, Redwood became an all-woman, worker-run organization and was moving toward worker-ownership. Each woman shared the stamp licking as well as the decision making. Redwood made a very complex decision to work exclusively with the newly developed Womens Independent Label Distributors (WILD) but to continue to link lesbian-feminist issues with other political issues.

Near began building bridges between political and cultural movements and Redwood supported her work. She did not desert movements but worked to stress similarities rather than differences. Redwood began to distribute and promote other artists. Sweet Honey in the Rock, a group of women who sang contemporary and traditional songs of the black experience, connected black and left audiences to the women's community.

Meanwhile, Near began to record music about women's lives, music that offered some new understanding of their experiences, holding to the 'personal is political' ideology of the feminist movement. The resulting album, Imagine My Surprise, was called Near's finest achievement by the lesbian-feminist community. Unlike the previous three albums Imagine My Surprise was devoted specifically to the women's community and was seen as Near's "first woman-identified album." Unlike the previous three album jackets, the traditional folk madonna was gone. In its place was a picture of a short haired, smiling Near. The lesbian-feminist influence on this album was obvious. On the inner sleeve, Near stated:

> One surprise was discovering that for many women, lesbianism is more than "sexual preference" as it is often so narrowly defined. For me, it opened up many doors; emotional, spiritual, cultural, and political. The new songs come through these doors (Near, 1979).

Credit was meticulously given to everyone from the musicians' mothers to the inner sleeve photographer. Imagine My Surprise also had a quieter, more acoustic sound than earlier albums. This may have been due to Meg Christian's guitar in place on Jeffrey Langley's piano. Christian's influence was clear through the three songs she co-authored as well as her part in the

album's arranging, mixing, and supporting vocals. With the exception of the three songs used which were co-written with Langley, the album was entirely woman-made.

Although woman-centered, the songs on Imagine My Surprise were as broad in subject matter as Near's previous albums; songs of disabled women, tortured women in Chile, women in mental institutions, and women from lesbian herstory. The album's keynote song, "Fight Back," was an uncompromising battle cry for women's freedom:

> We can all be battered and raped.
> So we better fight back
> In large numbers
> Fight back
> We can't make it alone
> Fight back
> In large numbers
> Together we can make a safe home.

Sales figures for Imagine My Surprise were 10,000 units in the first month of release. All four albums together had sold a total of 100,000 copies in 1979. These sales seem modest when compared to the dominant music industry sales, until one considers the absence of mainstream radio air play and publicity. One of the workers at Redwood stated they promoted the music without compromising themselves and "without selling our distribution system down the river" (Greenfield, 1979a, 23).

Sweet Honey in the Rock's Redwood album sold only 16,000 copies. Although the production and distribution of Sweet Honey in the Rock's album had been a learning and growing experience, Redwood realized it hadn't sufficiently capitalized itself to take on the production of other artists. Redwood returned to the one artist format.[31]

By 1979, with Redwood $75,000 in debt and in a state of internal conflict, the women of Redwood decided to end their working relationship. Near planned to fold Redwood Records, feeling it was draining too much energy from her music and political work. Meanwhile Jo-Lynne Worley and Joanie Shoemaker, women's music producers, record distributors, and bookstore workers in Kansas City, Missouri, began regular contact with Near and helped her plan a new nationwide tour. In January 1980, Worley and Shoemaker convinced Near to give Redwood another try. They would relieve the business pressures so Near could do her work. Worley and Shoemaker used their experience in retail, production, and distribution to figure out what Redwood needed.

The lives of Redwood and Holly Near were always interconnected, so it came as no surprise when a change in business management resulted in a change in Near's image. Her music had always been a composite of issues and styles so the three partners decided to diversify even more and give Near the chance to use as many of her talents as possible. The partners also felt it was politically important for Near's music to reach as many people as possible. That meant a tactical approach to promotion and air play. The initial result was a slicker image, a commercial look in an album entitled Fire in the Rain. Changes, although seen to some as a sell out, were intentional. First, June Millington, one of the original members of "Fanny," was hired as album producer for her experience with contemporary musical styles. Redwood decided to see what would happen if Near's voice was kept intact but backed up by a group of

musicians who were more accustomed to playing the kind of music played on the radio. Fire in the Rain still included the most known women musicians in women's music, and the songs reflected a lesbian-feminist perspective, though not as blatant as Imagine My Surprise.

Trying for radio air play, Redwood chose to release as a single a very pretty, non-political tune, "Once or Twice." Some radio stations added it to their playlist without much controversy. Redwood also hired industry professional Augie Blume and his wife to 'work' the record, giving it the best shot for widespread exposure. The result was a sale of 30,000 copies in the first month of release and national television appearances for Near on the "Today Show" and "Sesame Street" and more written press. In an interview published in People Magazine entitled "Never in the Closet or on the Charts (Yet), Holly Near Sings Uncompromisingly of Gay Love," Near stated:

> I'm not willing to change who I am to sell a record. But being known to the general population is exciting to me. I don't see that as selling out (Faber, 1981, 104).

In that same article, David Rubinson, ex-manager of the Pointer Sisters stated:

> Holly could be as big as Linda Ronstadt without changing her music. But she made a conscious decision to stand by her real fans instead of sacrificing them for megasales (Faber, 1981, 104).

Fire in the Rain did not exclude Near's feminist politics. For example, in A Live Album, Near sang about her man being laid off. In Fire in the Rain, the same tune is revised with lyrics which discuss Near's own troubles when she is laid off. The love songs in Fire in the Rain were directed to Near's female lover

but the lyrics were a bit more discrete than in Imagine My Surprise. Fire in the Rain was produced, recorded, etc. by women.

By 1981, Redwood Records was recognized for its production excellence. Aggressive distribution and promotion by Redwood had boosted total sales of Near's five albums to over 250,000 units (1982). Redwood paid back its $75,000 debt in 1980 and grossed another $250,000 in 1982.

Unlike other alternative artists, Near chose not to pursue an offer from Columbia Records, staying with the grassroots network which had brought her this far. She had produced five albums on her own label and had experience a successful 30 city tour in which she often played to sell out crowds. She wrote deliberately about political issues, decried repressive governments and prison conditions, and sang love songs which honored the lover's strength and independence rather than heartbreak and loneliness. Near continued to support lesbian-feminism, explaining it in this way:

> The right for people to have same sex relationships is just that. Lesbian-feminism incorporates fighting racism, and sexism, dealing with children and education and the environment, and preventing nuclear holocaust. You have to look at all oppression that affects women you live with and love (McMahon, 1981, 14).

Near explained that the continual broadening of her politics was intentional and designed to bridge gaps. Due to her performance style and all-American looks, she was able to reach those who would not normally listen to a political singer. Near's political success, it seemed to her, was in part due to her ability to reach diverse segments of society.

In 1983, Redwood Records celebrated its tenth anniversay. The Redwood staff consisted of the three partners, four staff workers, a warehouse, and a distribution manager. Redwood became a production-management team based on Near's cultural and political work.

That same year, Near's sixth album, Speed of Light was released, selling over 30,000 copies despite the fact that overall industry sales were down 60 percent. Speed of Light appeared as lushly produced and commercially slick as Fire in the Rain. Guest musicians on Speed of Light included Linda Tillery, Vicki Randle, Robben Ford (from the late Charles Ford Blues Band), and the Afrikan Dreamland (three black reggae musicians from Nashville). The coalition of political and cultural musicians was a clear demonstration of Near's overall philosophy of bridging movements. Song selection reinforced this philosophy. Two of the songs were truly mainstream. In fact, one song, "Back Off," became Billboard's pick of the week and was added to dozen of AM radio playlists across the U.S. On the same side as "Back Off" though, was an overtly political song entitled "Emma," dedicated to the anarchist Emma Goldman. Side two of the album began with a fairly mainstream sound, seducing the listener into a mix of percussive sounds and political messages. "El Salvador," a stark protest with a Spanish verse, was followed by two anti-nuclear songs. The album's last song was the clearest demonstration of Near's philosophy and future direction.

Afrikan Dreamland and Near closed the album with a reggae-tinged plea for political unity:

> One man fights the KKK
> But he hates the queers
> One woman fights for ecology
> It's equal rights she fears
> Some folks know that war is hell
> But then they put down the blind
> I think there must be a common ground
> But it's mighty hard to find
> Hang on, don't give up the ship
> Hang on, don't let the anchor slip
> We are all sailors and we're in mutiny
> The safety of this journey depend on
> Unity

The album's inner sleeve included a thank you to supporters, producers, and partners of Redwood followed by a personal note to Near's father, "Russell, this is our first album without you but we feel you with us out there in the speed of light. (1909-1982)."

A more diverse audience became interested in Speed of Light. For those who weren't attracted to the acoustic songs of the past albums, the horns, strings, and the reggae beat were an added encouragement to buy the album. The sound was fuller but the tactics remained the same: making political isuues personal. Near sings of the evils of nuclear war and also of her fear for her newborn nephew and his chances for survival. The individualizing brings the message home to the listener.

The tour that followed Speed of Light focused on nuclear disarmament. Redwood intentionally used a normal advertising gimmick to attract various people to the disarmament stance. The poster for the tour revealed a compelling, glossy photo of Near, underlined by a simple bold command, "Be Disarming." At first

glance, the poster looked like a toothpaste or perfume ad. The text continued: "To Challenge the Nuclear Mentality." Indeed, the tour attracted very different groups. Old fans (anti-war activists and lesbian-feminists) rubbed shoulders with new fans (environmentalists and anti-nuke activists).

This emphasis on connecting various groups continued with Near's next album, Lifeline, in which she collaborated with Ronnie Gilbert. Gilbert had been a strong influence in Near's life, as one of the female singers Near heard as a child. Near also dedicated her second album, A Live Album to Gilbert. Near never met Gilbert until A Live Album was brought to Gilbert's attention by her daughter, Lisa. Gilbert knew nothing about the album, the dedication or Near nor was she particularly pleased to be affiliated with the music of the 1970s. Through a mutual friend, Near found Gilbert and sent her an album. Gilbert listened to a few songs and was struck by the voice and songs of Holly Near.

By the time the Weaver's Carnegie Hall reunion was held, Near and Gilbert had become friends and the Weavers asked Near to join than on stage in what was to become their last concert. When Wasn't That A Time was shown on PBS, the Gilbert/Near duo won critical acclaim and the two decided to tour the country. Lifeline was the result of that tour. The album included songs from the last 50 years of political music and a medley of love songs. The bridge built by these two women crossed movements, musical styles, age, and gender. If the "Be Disarming" tour brought together a diverse crowd, the "Lifeline" tour brought together a political menagerie.[21]

During this time, Redwood Records was heralded as one of the few companies to survive the slump in the recording industry "with an ease unknown to most independents in that field" (Johnson, H.C., 1983, 15). From 1980 to 1983 revenues rose from $150,000 to an expected $650,000. Near's concert audience doubled and the market Redwood sought next was international.

Just before Christmas, 1983, Redwood release a retrospective album entitled Journeys. Most of these songs from Near's first albums were original recordings with a few remixed for better sound and a few which included more updated lyrics. "It Could Have Been Me," from Near's A Live Album replaced the section on Kent State, Victor Jara, and female jungle soldiers (1974) with the updated political action of Karen Silkwood, Nicaragua and El Salvador (1983). The inner sleeve photos included an autobiographical sketch of Near and the growth of Redwood Records from 1973 to 1983.

With 1984 came a new tour, a new album, and a new connection with another musical group and sound. Trapezoid, a West Virginia quartet, and John McCutcheon, a dulcimer player-fiddler, brought a new acoustic, traditional folk sound back to Near's music. This unlikely combination of musicians first got together when Trapezoid and McCutchen invited Near to perform at the Augusta Arts Festival. Near responded, "Are you sure you want me? Do you know what kind of music I do?" They knew. Two years later, Near returned to teach a progressive song writing program directed by McCutcheon. Soon after, McCutcheon and Near decided to work on an album together and another coalition was formed.

The album entitled, Watch Out was a powerful mixture. The title song has a very political message and a message is written concerning President Reagan on the inner sleeve:

> Sending troops and 'advisors' all over the world-especially to Lebanon, Granada, El Salvador, Nicaragua. For as long as we support systems of government that think they must control the world there will always be a 'man like that.' Watch Out (Near, 1984, inner sleeve).

In some ways, this album was reminiscent of Near's early work with an emphasis on her voice instead of the back up band, changing the sound and commercialism of Lifeline, Speed of Light, and Fire in the Rain.

In 1985, Holly Near came out with another album which formed another coalition. The group she worked with is an exiled Chilean group known as Inti-Illimani. The album, in many ways, is much more an album of Inti-Illimani than of Holly Near although she sings and has a few songs of her own on the album. The album was promoted with a tour by Inti-Illimani and Holly Near as well.

Summation

The past work of Redwood Records and Holly Near shows a clear line of change. Near grew up in a home with more than average political activity. Her parents were union organizers and politics was a part of her life. Near's interest and direction in political music was not a surprise, given these influences and the music she listened to as a child.

Near's political work with the anti-war movement parallels that of other leaders in the feminist movement. But her acceptance of and involvement with other political movements was an indicator that she would becaome a builder of political

coalitions. Near's feminist values, demonstrated by her song lyrics, may not have been intentional but her acceptance of the feminist ideology and later, lesbian-feminism follows the pattern of many women's music peformers. Near's involvement with the lesbian-feminist community (musically and emotionally) was obvious in her Imagine My Surprise album. Her change in image at this time may have reflected her full acceptance of the community as well as her need for identification.

Redwood was obviously affected by this subcultural influence. Following the politically correct structure of the feminist movement (anti-hierarchical with movement related goals), Redwood became woman-worked and woman-controlled. Yet, like other alternative organizations, it had to exist within a capitalist order. The need for economic stability was a factor. Similar organizations had failed and Redwood found itself in debt.

Even in the separatist years when Near stopped working with men, Redwood Records and Near continued to build bridges between movments. As if part of the feminist ideology was to become a bridge builder, a linking pin between political and cultural movements. With the formation of the Redwood partnership, economic stability, coalition building, and a new image and music helped Redwod grow and continue its poliitcal work.

The new structure brought with it certain changes in the image of Holly Near, yet with an ingrained emphasis on political and cultural work. The political market had been expanded and, with it, the audience for Near's music. On one hand, the

increased audience insured a more complete distribution of the message. One the other hand, this increase also ensured economic stability through the sale of concert tickets, albums, and tapes. There appears to be a fine balance between politics and economics in the operation of Redwood Records, resulting in more mainstream exposure, economic stability, growth in audience, staff, and album sales, and a strong political base.

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